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THE LAND PROBLEM AND RURAL WELFARE—DISCUSSION

W. O. HEDRICK.—The fundamental relation of farming to our national life is borne witness to through the fact that both the aspects of land which Professor Vogt discusses have been the subjects of statistical interest for many years. The public has become only recently interested in the size of business generally, but since 1890 our census bureau has collected statistics relative to the size of farms. Speaking generally the public cares not at all whether factories and stores and railroads are rented or are owned by their operators, but it has given much attention to the ownership and rental tenure of land since 1880.

The curious fact is revealed by the last census enumeration (1910) that it is the very large farm which has been notable during the past ten years. The farms of from 500 to 999 acres have had second place in growth of numbers, have exceeded all others in absorbing total farm area, have exceeded all others in enlarging improved acreage per farm, have shown the biggest increase in value of total farm property of any class, were second greatest in increased building valuation, have had greatest increase in machinery valuation and third greatest in live stock increase. The relatively small number of these farms, however, robs this record of much significance in characterizing American farm sizes.

With regard to landlordism and tenantry, the same motive which is relied upon by society to secure effective farm handling, namely, "self-interest," is the very one which stimulates tenants to rent farms. The farm business requires a combination of several factors—notably land, labor, and equipment—for its best success. The extremely high price of all these elements renders it sometimes necessary that two enterprises should combine their factors—one furnishing land, the other labor and equipment—and we have, therefore, the landlord and tenant relation. Farm management studies show almost invariably that tenant farmers make good labor incomes, and no little care should be taken in disturbing a system not adverse to public policy which with all its faults is distinctly profitable to the farmer.

Country life improvement may indeed be hindered in its coöperative aspect, as Professor Vogt points out, by the presence of the shifting tenant; but an even more fundamental wrong may be done by striking at the productivity of agriculture itself in the attempt to eliminate this sort of farmer. Commonly it is assumed that tenancy is a stepping-

stone to ultimate land ownership. The young farmer or the needy farmer may come to own a farm through a preliminary period spent as a tenant farmer, or he may attain full ownership through the mortgage-indebtedness route. Comparing only the more superficial features of these two methods of reaching the same end, we have the following results.

Through having the stimulus to industry which comes from ownership and through directing his business at will, the mortgager is advantaged, but he is limited in his farm operations through having invested his capital in land. On the other hand, the tenant leaves to the landlord the burden of carrying all the unproductive farm parts, such as buildings, fences, lanes, wood lot, etc. He is further advantaged through putting all his capital into live stock and equipment, thus being enabled to operate to the maximum of profitableness. He gains nothing, however, by the appreciation in value of land.

The suppression of tenancy as advocated in the paper which has just been read restricts the young farmer, or the impecunious farmer, to alternatives which may prove hurtful from the business standpoint. The going in debt for a full-sized farm as we have seen is apt to leave the farmer short-handed in the means for the operation of this farm. Another alternative is the little farm—one which he is able to pay for and have some means left over—but every study of the little farm has convinced the student of the utter unprofitableness of this style of farming. Farm machinery is standardized in size to the needs of the full-sized farm; a profitable number of labor hours for men or team can only be found upon the full-sized farm. Insufficient variations of enterprises and too high costs in overhead expenses are only a few of the many reasons given for the unprofitableness of the small farm.

The sharing of the expenses of carrying on a farm business between two parties—one furnishing the land factor and the other the labor and equipment—has afforded a successful farm business in the past and still has merits for the future. We find nothing to justify the belief expressed by Professor Vogt that the landlord share is to grow larger to the disadvantage of the tenant through the income-absorbing power of land. Landlords will doubtless always secure the returns which are possible to them through owning advantageous differentials in land. These differentials tend to become accentuated with the increase in price of farm products but the means have not yet been shown whereby the landlord can wrest away from the renter any share to which the renter is properly entitled.

Tenancy, it may be said in conclusion, has stood the test of experience. We do not mean by this any tenant system—absentee landlordism or rock renting, for example—but good systems have survived. The greatest system of farming in the world measured by the test of endurance is a tenant system. In England all but four or five per cent of the farmers are tenants, yet English farming has given us our leading types of live stock, our best farm practices, such as marling, drainage, rotations, and the measure in acres of our customary farm. On the other hand, among the farm-owning peasants of Continental Europe (other than the extremely recent notion of coöperation) scarcely a single fruitful farm notion has developed. Few breeds of farm animals or practices have been originated. Women customarily do the farm work and the peasant himself is frequently unable to speak the language of the country in which he lives. The test of a system of agriculture is the character of its professional representatives; and without doubt the British farmer, though a tenant, ranks high among farmers everywhere. The constantly enlarging growth in numbers of population in his country make ever-increasing demands upon the output from the farms. This inevitably leads to intensive cultivation with all its expensiveness in land, equipment, and labor. It seems almost unthinkable under these circumstances that a normal tenancy system should not develop here as in England.

JAMES B. MORMAN.—The land problem as conceived by Professor Vogt centers in farm tenancy. The chief points discussed are the size of farm holdings and the relation of ownership to the successful operation of the farm. The evidence presented and the reasoning based upon that evidence aim to show the relation of the land problem to the economic and social welfare of rural communities. Let us briefly examine these two aspects of the land problem.

1. *The size of holdings.*—Some evidence is presented to show a tendency toward centralization of farm land ownership in certain parts of the United States. But this movement it is shown is not general. It is held, in fact, that "extremely large holdings in areas of general farming are survivals of an earlier period rather than a recent development."

From the standpoint of large land holdings there is believed to be no great problem and no menace to rural welfare. If any such tendency toward centralization of farmland holdings had been shown, state

legislation could be suggested as a practical remedy, as applied in Australia and New Zealand, limiting the size of land holdings by individuals and corporations. This limitation prevents land speculation, lowers the price of land, and tends to bring it into cultivation much quicker.

On the other hand, from a review of statistical data it is maintained that there is a tendency "in the direction of increase in medium-sized farms." This fact being conceded, an explanation of it is the spread of more intelligent farming. This has doubtless been due first to a scarcity of farm labor and, secondly, to the work of the agricultural colleges and experiment stations.

The scarcity of farm labor forced the farmer to limit his productive energies to the cultivation of a diminished acreage. The effort to do this, when coupled with more intelligent direction along the lines of intensive farming, brought a realization of the fact that a farmer could procure better returns with less labor from 40 acres well cultivated than from 80 or more acres poorly cultivated along extensive lines.

Very little consideration, therefore, need be given to the topic of the size of farm holdings. Whatever problem there may be connected with it tends to correct itself by means of educational forces set in motion by state and national authority. This brings us, therefore, to Professor Vogt's main thesis, namely, that "the real land question is one of ownership in relation to the economic welfare of the people who actually live on the farm."

2. *The problem of farm tenancy.*—This topic is not discussed from a national point of view. It is conceded at the outset that, in a large part of the United States, farm tenancy has a low percentage as compared with farm ownership. The seriousness of the problem is limited to the great productive corn-belt states. This is a region where farm lands have reached a high state of cultivation, where diversified farming predominates, and where land values for ordinary farming purposes are comparatively high.

But even in this section of our country, many of the states show a relatively low percentage of farm tenancy. At the same time it is contended that the increase in tenancy is continuous "and appears to be based on causes upon which no legislation or other factors have as yet had any influence."

The problem raised in this particular section of the United States is farm tenancy *versus* absentee landlordism. In this case absentee landlordism has a relatively limited economic and social range. The

landlord who leases his farm to a tenant is not a large land-owning aristocrat, but a retired farmer. He has by hard, continuous, intelligent labor produced a competency from the soil without destroying its fertility. He has preserved for posterity to a large extent the natural resources of the soil. He has demonstrated to the world that, under proper farm management, agriculture is an industry which may be made highly profitable. For these results the landowner should be praised and not condemned. The prosperous farmer, however, finally has retired to the village, town, or city to enjoy the fruits of his long labors, or to afford better educational facilities for his family; and here the real farm tenancy problem may be conceived as beginning.

Farm tenancy may be examined from two points of view, namely, an irrational system of leasing farms and the difficulties of acquiring ownership.

The responsibility for the exploitation of leased farms lies almost entirely with the owner and not with the tenant. If a landowner has no more sense than to permit the fertility or wealth-producing power of his land, which is his basic or fixed capital, to be unscrupulously mined by a tenant, he is culpably negligent toward his own interests and those of posterity.

A rational system of leasing farms,—such as is practiced in Great Britain, which favors long-term tenure, protects the tenant in his rights arising from the use of fertilizers and the making of improvements, and gives the owner supervisory interest over the system of crop production and farm management,—not only provides a plan for the most efficient economic use of land for agricultural purposes, but conserves the natural resources of the soil for future generations.

The problem of irrational leasing of farm lands offers no serious obstacle to economic or social progress in its relation to rural and national welfare. It is a matter of education and wise state legislation. This problem has been solved to a large extent in Italy, Denmark, Great Britain, and other European countries. It can easily be solved in our own country when it becomes a real menace. We can pass on, therefore, to consider the other phase of the problem, namely, the difficulties of acquiring ownership of farms by farm laborers and tenant farmers.

To limit the discussion of this aspect of farm tenancy to the productive states of the north central Mississippi Valley region, where farm lands are high in price, would not be fair. The inability of the farm laborer or the tenant farmer to accumulate sufficient money with which

to purchase raw land or an equipped farm seems to be the core of the problem of farm tenancy.

The difficulty of becoming a farm owner, however, varies in different parts of the United States. Some homestead lands are still open for settlement; raw lands in some parts of the country can be bought as low as from \$5 to \$10 an acre; the value of the average cultivated farm lands runs about \$100 an acre; in the corn belt \$200 an acre is not an unusually high price; orchard lands in Oregon and Washington are frequently estimated at \$1000 an acre; citrus fruit and walnut orchards in California are sometimes valued at \$1500 an acre; and recently a correspondent writing from Florida appraised the value of some orange groves at \$2500 an acre.

The difficulties of passing from the tenant class to the farm-owning class are intensified, therefore, in different parts of the country and with different kinds of agricultural production. For diversified agricultural purposes, the man who buys an ordinary farm by paying down part of the cash price assumes a tremendous responsibility as a result of the precariousness of farming as an industry, in meeting interest charges, in the payment of taxes, insurance, and other expenses involved in land ownership. On the other hand, if one pays cash for a high-priced farm, unless he is going into farming for the fun of it, his course is one of doubtful wisdom, because under existing economic and social conditions he could get better and safer returns for his money if invested in good securities at 5 or 6 per cent interest.

It is not a safe assumption that passing from the tenant class to the farm-owning class removes any of the difficulties surrounding modern economic and social life or solves the problem of rural welfare. As a matter of fact it does not. Under a fair system of leasing farms thousands of tenants are providing themselves with an adequate return for their labor alone, where thousands of landowners fail to do so as a return for their labor and capital together.

But assuming that as a rule farm ownership is preferable to farm tenancy, the question is how this change can be brought about. In the United States there is no difficulty whatever in one acquiring the class of land he wants to meet his financial condition. The principal question to be solved, therefore, is, How can one improve his financial condition so as to provide the means of purchasing land? And the answer would seem to be by working and saving.

But if the farm laborer or tenant farmer does not or can not save something from the fruits of his labor, then he can not very well pur-

chase land or a farm. However, the welfare of the state requires that he be made a landowner, then he must be lifted over bodily from one class into the other by means of state aid and in violation of the most elementary economic principles.

But to grant state aid for any such thing would also violate the fundamental law of social progress. It would be an attempt to set aside the natural law of the struggle for existence; it would seek to counteract by legislative enactment the old command, "Thou shalt earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow." Necessity forces us to toil, and saving the surplus product of labor is the first step in the accumulation of property and becomes a justification of private ownership.

In buying and selling land, the disposal of it to a tenant implies the whole or part of the purchase price in the hands of the tenant as a result of saving. This is a condition which can economically exist. The tenant can become a landowner without state aid of any kind. It is not so much the price of land, but the ability of the worker to earn and save the price, which constitutes the heart of the problem of farm tenancy.

But the writer of the paper under discussion is himself in doubt about his own position on the price of land. He gives no note of positiveness to his statements. He ends up with saying, "*if a tax were so adjusted,*" and "*if present tendencies were bringing serious problems,*" then the reformer is justified in advocating radical remedies. But no remedy, radical or otherwise, is positively stated or suggested, unless it is contained in the statement that "the control of the situation demands state action as well as individual education."

The causes of farm tenancy, therefore, lie deeper than the mere price of land, and they are practically beyond the reach of legislative enactment. Professor Vogt himself believes that state policies may alleviate the problem of farm tenancy but can not solve it. How the problem is to be solved is not apparent.

In dealing with the problem of farm tenancy we should not lose sight of the fact that fundamentally the causes of the problem are biological and not political. Let us not forget that the soil is the source of human slavery. In procuring subsistence the problems of life begins; therein the problems end. But in the course of life between the beginning and the end arise all our economic, social, and political problems. For centuries man struggled against the forces of nature which enslaved him to the soil; for many other centuries he struggled against his stronger fellow man who had bound him to the

soil. And when at last in his struggle toward liberty he found himself unshackled from the chains of chattel slavery, it was only to realize that what is called civilization, or social progress, had forged other chains about him which enslave him none the less. Neither the tenant nor the landowner is free. Besides the law of necessity which forces him to bear the heat and burden of the day, direct and indirect taxation deprive him of an ever enlarging part of the fruits of his labor. So, with the progress of civilization, the difficulty of saving is not lightened. Taxation as a result of economic, social, political, military, and financial conditions tends to enslave the man who is producing wealth from the soil almost as certainly as when under the bonds of chattel slavery.

The trend of modern social life is for the individual to try to escape as much as possible from the arduous physical labor of wealth production. This is especially the case with farming with its long hours of labor, often performed every day of the year, and with the uncertainties of its reward. When to these burdens are added the disadvantages of lack of educational facilities, social isolation, increasing taxation, and high interest rates on loans, the lot of the farmer has not been and is not now an enviable one. While he may have tried to escape his thralldom, society has made every effort to keep him at his task. What the farmer produces society must have three times a day, and everything must be done to keep him at hard labor.

In contrast with the farm, the call of the city is to regular hours of labor, for six days of the week, at a known wage. This is from the standpoint of the laborer and the mechanic. The higher the walks in business, educational, social, military, and political life, the less physical toil is required and the higher the rewards. As soon as they are old enough to leave home, the easier labor of business and professional life beckons to our boys and girls on the farm and they bid farewell to the home in the country. These beckonings have their effect in depopulating rural districts and in over-populating the towns and cities.

And here I wish to read a letter which I recently received. It is from a tenant and sets forth the land problem from his point of view. The letter is as follows:

Under the new law Farm Loan Act, I am anxious for some information in regards how to proceed in getting a loan for buying a farm. I am sincere in this matter, for at present time I am a tenant giving \$1.00 for every \$2.00 that is made. I am farming 120 acres for share rent and am also clerk for our township.

Serving as a renter is up-hill business, for farm help is next to impossible

to get. The day laborer is making more money than the renter at prices we have to pay here in the country in the state of Ohio. The workshops and manufacturing places of Fostoria, Ohio, are offering \$3.00 to \$5.00 per day for labor. With a few exceptions, the laboring man is scarce in our towns. I know of one factory which has lately employed men above 65 years of age and paying them from \$2.25 to \$2.85 per day. So you see the inducements are tempting for a renter to leave the farm. Then in most cases they only work 8 hours per day and are done for the day. We farmers work 10 hours to 12 hours, then have 2 hours of chores per day extra.

With all of the above to consider, we care nothing about leaving the farm providing we own a small farm of our own, so we would not be looking for the landlord to come and say more, more; although it has never happened to me until now. I have been married nine years and have lived nine years on this one farm. But the owner wants to farm it again himself with present prices, who has an advantage in owning his own farm.

Now I will tell you why I do not care to move to town. I am a young man thirty-one years of age and in good health. I have always lived on a farm, married a farmer's daughter, and have two boys. We do not care to take them to town if we can make farmers of them, for that is what is going to handicap this country. The parents are leaving the farms and going to towns and cities; and after that small boy has grown to be a man and learned the city's ways, there is very small hope of that boy ever moving on a farm again.

My parents are owners of a farm and also my wife's people; therefore I can give the best of reference and security. What I now ask for is: How do you go about it to get a federal loan? Is it a personal loan from a federal bank or some other source? I wish you would forward papers of instruction at once. If you have not that power, I wish you would forward my name to the proper official who has that duty to fulfil.

I am very sorry to take your time to read this letter. But it may gain a point for you in your future work to know how there is one farmer boy who is forced to the city, providing we get no federal loan of some kind. I can rent plenty of good farms. But any ambitious man who has any business ability will not make a slave of himself by being a good tenant for the landowner for the best years of our life, when there are different business opportunities in view like there are under the present administration. I suppose there are hundreds of young men who are successful farmers as tenants or renters who are taking the present time under consideration as to what to do about leaving the farm.

Now what encouragement was I able to give this tenant farmer from the provisions of the Federal Farm Loan Act? Very little, unless he could become the nominal owner of a farm by purchase. But in that case he would not be a tenant but a poor landowner with no large equity in his farm. Whether his condition would be improved by a change from the renting to the owning class would be highly problematical in view of the preceding argument.

Now, what is the remedy for farm tenancy? I can see none except education and wise legislation. The roots of the problem of farm tenancy lie beyond the power of these forces to reach; they are the expression of natural law over which man has no control; before them the barrier is raised of *laissez faire*.

But when it comes to a consideration of the effects of farm tenancy on the welfare of the tenants and rural communities, it is the duty of

society through wise legislation to adopt policies which shall make farm life under tenant conditions worth the while, and which shall insure the greatest good to the state by conserving the fertility of the soil for the present and for future generations.

GEO. H. VON TUNGELN.—Professor Vogt has made two statements that I wish to comment on briefly:

1. He quotes from my colleague, Professor Lloyd's Bulletin to the effect that farmers today make their first payment on their farms from six to eight years later in life than did the farmers of twenty-five years ago. It is my impression that both the author and Professor Vogt convey an unfortunate idea through this statement. In the first place comparatively few farmers who bought their first farm twenty-five years ago had had a four-year high-school course and fewer still had had a four-year college course. If we are now right in holding up the ideal of our prospective future farmers, that they take a four-year college course in Agriculture, how can we hope to give them this additional educational preparation, of from four to eight years, and at the same time expect them to make their first payment on a farm as early in life as did those men, their fathers in many cases, who bought their first farms a quarter of a century ago, but who did not carry their educational preparation so far? Also, is it not probably true that business men and men in some of the other professions are starting out for themselves later in life now, due to a longer period of preparation, than men did in these same lines a quarter of a century ago? If this is true then the farmer is not in an unfortunate class as compared with his contemporaries in other fields, as these men seemingly would have us believe.

2. In another part of his paper, Professor Vogt states that, "Of owners' children 32.7 per cent have completed the district school while but 12.7 per cent of the tenants' children had done so." I doubt very much whether these figures will bear the test of careful examination, for from what information there is available it seems that the average age of tenants in this country is probably somewhere between 35 and 40 years, while the average age of the owner is probably somewhere between 43 and 48 years. The average age at the time of marriage for both groups was probably about 25 years. It follows, therefore, that a much larger proportion of the owners' children are old enough to have finished the district school than is true in case of the tenants' children. And from this it follows that unless the percentage of children in each class has been determined on the basis of the actual

number of children in each of the two groups who are old enough to have finished the district school, a thing that Professor Vogt does not tell us, a great injustice has been done the tenant farmers in this comparison.

J. G. THOMPSON.—It is impossible not to be concerned with regard to the conditions that seem to exist in many sections where farm tenancy prevails. We know enough about the situation to know that all is not well. It is to our advantage, then, that Professor Vogt has directed our attention anew to these conditions. At the same time it appears to me that Professor Vogt is generalizing far too widely on the basis of the data afforded or even available. There has been a great deal of talk about the evils attending the growth in farm tenancy in this country, and some good investigation, to the latter of which Professor Vogt himself has contributed notably. But this is a very large country and conditions vary greatly from place to place; and there is a great temptation to extend, to the country as a whole, the conclusions properly enough drawn from investigation in one section or in a few sections, and applicable in this limited way.

I may give an illustration of what seems to me the tendency, on Professor Vogt's part, thus to generalize too widely. He has called attention to the fact that a farm management survey in four counties in Ohio has shown that owner farms have a greater number of animal units per acre than do tenant farms in these same counties, and he concludes from this that the advance of tenancy is therefore disastrous. Now two pertinent remarks may be made with reference to this treatment of the data presented. In the first place, what is the real significance of the fact or facts stated? Is it to our advantage, or otherwise, when there are more animal units per acre? Authorities are not in agreement with reference to this point. There are those who point out that a meat diet is a relatively uneconomical diet. In the second place, investigation in some other sections shows that tenant farms in those sections have a greater number of animal units per acre than do owner farms. The data are evidently conflicting on this point. With but a limited amount of investigation, therefore, as to this factor, should not our conclusions be correspondingly restricted? It appears to me that there are a number of other illustrations in Professor Vogt's paper of this tendency to generalize too widely, and thus to indict a whole system on incomplete evidence.

Again, is the use of the taxing power for purposes of social reform,

as suggested by Professor Vogt, wise? We must, of course, have revenue to meet public expenditures; and if it seems best to take a part of the personally unearned increment in connection with land values for this purpose, then well and good. But is it wise to use the taxing power not primarily for raising revenue but to accomplish some extraneous object? Any one who has given a little study to the matter of taxation knows very well how very difficult it is to provide a tolerable system of taxation even when the eye is kept single to the one purpose of raising revenue. How much more difficult will it be, then, to construct an adequate and passable system of taxation when the matter is complicated by the attempt to use the taxing power so as to accomplish some great reform, admitted, for the sake of argument, to be desirable?

Lastly, whatever be the drawbacks relative to a system of farm tenancy, it would appear that such a system is much more democratic than one which involves a large amount of hired agricultural labor—a condition which would seem to be necessary in many cases if owner farms are to be large enough for efficient operation.

CHARLES L. STEWART.—It seems that a sinister meaning attaches to the fact that tenants who have purchased farms in the North Central states in recent years were older at the time of purchase than was formerly the case. We need not wonder at this. A farm of 160 acres in Illinois, for instance, is now worth \$30,000. This is more than twice the value of the same place a decade or two ago. To attain ownership of an enterprise of such magnitude naturally takes time. It is so in the case of urban enterprises capitalized at equally high figures. Possession of an urban enterprise may ordinarily be acquired by small steps through the purchase of a few more shares. The purchaser of a farm must usually buy the entire property at one time, or at any rate purchase fair-sized tracts. Should we not suppose, therefore, that when a farm is so much more valuable now than it used to be tenants would spend a longer period of years getting the money to buy a place and the experience at farm operation necessary to make it a profitable investment?

The high price of land not only lengthens the period of "apprenticeship" through which the eventual landowner must pass, but it brings pressure in favor of better methods of farming. When an acre of land is worth \$100, rents for \$5 a year, and increases in value \$10 a year, the increment accounts for two-thirds of the annual improvement in the owner's finances as affected by that acre. When, however, this

same acre of land is valued at \$200 and increases in value \$10 a year, as in the previous case, the increment is not so significant. In the latter case the annual rent is say \$10, so that only half of the owner's financial improvement as affected by that acre can be traced to increment. In other words, assuming an even interest rate, a higher price of land must be related to a larger absolute rent. But the annual increment can not be guaranteed to continue. It must ordinarily decline. Certainly it must be of less significance relative to the price of the land, and must, therefore, count less as an inducement to speculative valuation. As increment drops lower in the calculation of landowners, a more insistent emphasis is thrown upon operating returns. The owners then require more efficient farming. Only those operators may run farms who can make them pay.

Efficient farming is, after all, more important than the prevalence of operators of a particular tenure designation. The rising price of land brings a test of efficiency more and more strongly to bear, and operates with striking indifference to the mode of tenure. If owning operators can meet that test more successfully than operators who hire their land, the survival of operating ownership is assured. But whether the survivors be owners or tenants we may be certain that they must be high-grade farmers. From many points of view that is a more important and desirable development.